

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 AID-05 COME-00 EB-08 FRB-03 TRSE-00
XMB-02 OPIC-03 LAB-04 SIL-01 OMB-01 /088 W
-----108131 192204Z /64

P R 192106Z AUG 77
FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3302
INFO AMEMBASSY CARACAS
USSOUTHCOM
AMCONSUL BARRANQUILLA
AMCONSUL CALI
AMCONSUL MEDELLIN

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, ECON, ELAB, CO
SUBJECT: THE WEEK IN COLOMBIA

1. SUMMARY. THE LIBERAL PARTY'S SUMMIT MEETINGS IMPROVED THE PROSPECT FOR PARTY UNITY IN THE 1978 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION. EL TIEMPO CAME OUT IN SUPPORT OF CARLOS LLERAS' CANDIDACY. THE OSPINA-PASTRANA CONSERVATIVES ANNOUNCED A CONVENTION IN LATE OCTOBER TO WRITE A PLATFORM AND SELECT A PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE. THE GOC MADE OPTIMISTIC STATEMENTS ON STATE OF THE ECONOMY. DEMOCRATIC UNIONS KEPT THE THREAT OF A GENERAL STRIKE ALIVE WHILE WELCOMING AN OPPORTUNITY TO OPEN DIALOGUE WITH THE GOC. END SUMMARY.

2. LIBERAL PRESIDENTIAL PRE-CANDIDATES AGREE ON NOMINATION PROCEDURE. THE LIBERAL PARTY'S FOUR PRESIDENTIAL PRE-CANDIDATES, CARLOS LLERAS, JULIO CESAR TURBAY, HERNAN AGUDELO, AND CARLOS HOLMES AGREED DURING A SERIES OF MEETINGS TO FURTHER
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DEFINE THE SAN CARLOS AGREEMENT TO ENSURE THE SELECTION OF A SINGLE LIBERAL PRESIDENTIAL NOMINEE. UNDER THE CLARIFIED AGREEMENT, THE NOMINEE WILL BE THE CANDIDATE WHO RECEIVES THE GREATEST NUMBER OF POPULAR VOTES IN THE FEBRUARY CONGRESSIONAL ELECTIONS, IN WHICH LIBERAL CONGRESSIONAL CANDIDATES WILL BE IDENTIFIED WITH PRESIDENTIAL HOPEFULS. THE NOMINEE WILL THEN BE PROCLAIMED BY A "UNITED" LIBERAL PARTY NATIONAL CONVENTION IN EARLY MARCH. THE

ACCORD PRESUPPOSES PASSAGE OF A LEGISLATIVE ACT SEPARATING THE PRESIDENTIAL AND CONGRESSIONAL ELECTIONS.

3. EL TIEMPO SUPPORTS LLERAS CANDIDACY. COLOMBIA'S LEADING DAILY EL TIEMPO CAME OUT ON AUGUST 14 WITH AN EDITORIAL ENDORSEMENT OF CARLOS LLERAS AS THE LIBERAL PARTY PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE/ IN MAKING THIS ENDORSEMENT THE EDITORS NOTED THEY WOULD ALLOW THEIR COLUMNISTS TO CONTINUE TO SUPPORT OTHER CANDIDATES. THE EDITORS DESCRIBED LLERAS AS THE MOST QUALIFIED CANDIDATE, BOTH INTELLECTUALLY AND MORALLY, WHILE NOT ATTACKING LLERAS'S PARTY RIVALS. TURBAY RESPONDED BY NOTING THAT HE IS THE CANDIDATE OF THE PEOPLE, NOT OF THE OLIGARCHY, AND THEREFORE DOES NOT NEED THE SUPPORT OF THE ESTABLISHMENT PRESS. HE CLAIMED THAT THE PRESS NO LONGER HAS THE INFLUENCE IT ONCE HAD OVER NATIONAL POLITICAL EVENTS, AND THAT THE POPULAR PRESS, I.E. THAT WHICH SUPPORTS HIM, AND RADIO-TV WILL GET HIS MESSAGE TO THE PEOPLE. DESPITE TURBAY'S PROTESTATIONS, EL TIEMPO'S ENDORSEMENT WILL GIVE LLERAS A MAJOR ADVANTAGE IN THE LIBERAL CANDIDACY RACE.

4. OSPINA-PASTRANA FACTION TO HOLD CONVENTION. THE OSPINA-PASTRANA WING OF THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY ANNOUNCED ON AUGUST 18 THAT IT WILL HOLD A NATIONAL CONVENTION OCTOBER 22 TO PROCLAIM THAT PARTY'S CANDIDATE FOR PRESIDENT IN 1978, AND TO ESTABLISH THE PARTY'S CAMPAIGN PROGRAM. IN MAKING THE ANNOUNCEMENT, THE GROUP'S SPOKESMAN NOTED THAT BELISARIO BETANCUR HAS CONSIDERABLE SUPPORT FOR THE PARTY'S CANDIDACY, BUT THAT THE CONVENTION WILL MAKE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THE FINAL DECISION. THE DOOR WAS LEFT OPEN FOR THE ALVARO GOMEZ FACTION TO JOIN THE CONVENTION, BUT THIS SEEMS UNLIKELY. EACH FACTION CLAIMS SOLE LEGITIMACY AS THE TRUE CONSERVATIVE PARTY. SEPARATE CONVENTIONS BY THE TWO FACTIONS, HOWEVER, NEED NOT BE A SERIOUS PROBLEM IN THEIR AGREEING TO JOINTLY SUPPORT BETANCUR'S CANDIDACY.

5. THE ECONOMY LOOKS UP. PRESIDENT LOPEZ AND THE FINANCE MINISTER HAVE BEEN SOUNDING UPBEAT LATELY ABOUT THE ECONOMY. LOPEZ PREDICTED AN INFLATION RATE OF LESS THAN THIRTY PERCENT FOR THE YEAR AND THE MINISTER PREDICTED A ZERO PRICE INCREASE FOR THE MONTH OF AUGUST. THE INTERNATIONAL LENDERS IN THE PARIS CONSULTATIVE GROUP, AND AN ECLA REPORT ON COLOMBIA, BOTH GAVE COLOMBIA HIGH MARKS ON ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE IN SPITE OF THE RECORD INFLATION. THE GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN SUFFICIENTLY CONFIDENT OF PROGRESS IN SLOWING INFLATION TO CONTINUE A WEEKLY DEVALUATION, ALTHOUGH AT A RATE INSUFFICIENT TO STOP THE EROSION OF COLOMBIAN COMPETITIVENESS. IN THE EMBASSY VIEW, HIGH COFFEE AND SERVICE EARNINGS MASK A GRADUAL EROSION OF COLOMBIAN COMPETITIVENESS, AND IT IS COLOMBIA'S

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XMB-02 OPIC-03 LAB-04 SIL-01 OMB-01 /088 W
-----107982 192203Z /64

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INTERNATIONAL COMPETITIVENESS ON WHICH THE BASIC HEALTH OF
THE ECONOMY DEPENDS. UNTIL INFLATION IS WHIPPED AND THE PESO
IS MOVED APPROPRIATELY, WE BELIEVE THE ECONOMY IS VULNERABLE.

6. DEMOCRATIC UNION CAUTIOUS ON GENERAL STRIKE. COLOMBIA'S TWO
DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL TRADE UNION ORGANIZATIONS, THE UTC AND THE
CTC, HELD SPECIAL EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETINGS TO DISCUSS A POSSIBLE
NATIONWIDE 24-HOUR GENERAL STRIKE. THE TONE OF THESE DELIBERATIONS
WAS SOFTENED BY THE PUBLICATION EARLY IN THE WEEK OF A LETTER FROM
PRESIDENT LOPEZ TO THE CTC, IN WHICH HE INDICATED HIS DESIRE TO
OPEN A DIALOGUE WITH THE UNIONS TO SEEK SOLUTIONS TO WORKERS'
PROBLEMS. BOTH ORGANIZATIONS DECIDED TO ACCEPT THIS OPENING FOR
A DIALOGUE, BUT ALSO VOTED TO CALL A GENERAL STRIKE IF THIS
DIALOGUE SHOULD PROVE FUTILE. UNION LEADERS PUBLICLY REJECTED ANY
COORDINATED STRIKE ACTION WITH LEFT-WING UNIONS, WHICH HAVE STATED
THEY WILL HOLD A NATIONWIDE 24-HOUR CIVIC STRIKE DURING

THE FIRST FIFTEEN DAYS OF SEPTEMBER. PRIVATELY, DEMOCRATIC UNION
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OFFICIALS VOICED CONCERN OVER THE POSSIBILITY OF A COORDINATED
STRIKE GETTING OUT OF CONTROL, AND BEING USED BY LEFTISTS FOR

POLITICAL PURPOSES. THEY VOICED CONCERN THAT A CONFRONTATION WITH THE GOC MIGHT ENDANGER THE NATION'S DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE, AND LEAD TO MILITARY INTERVENTION IN THE GOVERNMENT. THE THREAT OF A GENERAL STRIKE, THEY HOPED, WILL BRING ABOUT GOC ACTIONS TO ALLEVIATE INFLATIONARY PRESSURES ON THE WORKERS. MEANWHILE, A NATIONWIDE TEACHERS STRIKE HAS BEEN SET FOR AUGUST 22, BUT BOTH UNION AND GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS ARE ATTEMPTING TO REACH AGREEMENT IN ORDER TO AVOID THIS STOPPAGE.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLITICAL SUMMARIES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 19-Aug-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977BOGOTA07766
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770300-0787
Format: TEL
From: BOGOTA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770846/aaaabmbw.tel
Line Count: 179
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: fa270358-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 11-Jan-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1553856
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: THE WEEK IN COLOMBIA
TAGS: PINT, ECON, ELAB, CO
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/fa270358-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009